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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/SPG, S/E WILLIAMSON
NSC FOR PITTMAN AND HUDSON

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TAGS: PREF SU AU PGOV UN

SUBJECT: MORE BLUSTER FROM PARTY LEADER NAFIE

Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Addressing a massive rally February 18 in Sodiri, on the Kordofan/Darfur border, Presidential Advisor and National Congress Party leader Dr. Nafie Ali Nafie lashed out at the US administration and said that Secretary Rice should "lick her elbow" (do the impossible) if she believes that Sudan would succumb to US and western pressures to abandon its adherence to Islamic sharia law, or to allow international interference in internal matters. During his speech Nafie also told the crowd that UNAMID activity in Darfur would be restricted to its explicit mandate, and would not be permitted to exceed it in the slightest. According to daily newspaper Akher Lahza, Nafie also derisively characterized the hybrid force as "forces of dough," and referred to JEM as "robbers and murderers."

¶2. (C) Nafie's speech provides a sharp contrast to remarks made by Presidential Advisor Dr. Mustafa Osman Ismail the same day, who said that his recent visit to Washington with FM Deng Alor had been a successful one. In his press statements, Osman said that discussions included proposals on normalizing US-Sudan relations. Osman did not elaborate further, saying that additional details would be made public once the FM returned and had the opportunity to brief President Bashir (Alor returns Wednesday evening). Other press reports hinted that one outcome of the visit would be the resolution of the fates of Sudanese Guantanamo detainees, possibly to include the release of Al Jazeera cameraman Sami al-Haj.

¶3. (C) Charge Fernandez spoke on February 19 to Dr. Mustafa and chided him for the tone of Nafie's remarks so soon after an ostensibly positive visit to Washington by the Foreign Minister and Ismail himself. Ismail answered that Sudan is sincere about everything it said in Washington and that Nafie's off-the-cuff remarks were for internal consumption, to a popular audience and need to be put in context. "Sharia is not something on your agenda in Sudan, CPA and Darfur are," he noted, "Nafie's words are meaningless". Ismail added that the US should not read too much into such outbursts but be guided by the written remarks of President Al-Bashir "which are not hostile to the US, to UNAMID implementation or to the CPA." He further riposted that sometimes senior US officials, even President Bush, say things about Sudan that they have to say for a domestic audience, but "we understand how the game is played".

¶4. (C) Comment: Both Nafie's overheated rhetoric and his timing are typical of the power jockeying that takes place within the NCP. While Osman's public remarks are not necessarily conciliatory, they at least suggest that the state of US-Sudan relations is negotiable rather than permanently, negatively fixed. Ismail's personal comments to the CDA are right in that President Al-Bashir's official

remarks are the best gauge of Sudanese policy, but the regime risks alienating its own radicalized masses if it continues to whip them up and really does want a better relationship with the U.S. Such a relationship would, sooner or later, lead to confrontation with, or marginalization of, extremists like Dr. Nafie. End comment.

FERNANDEZ